INSTITUTE FOR DEFENSE ANALYSES

400 Army-Navy Drive, Arlington, Virginia 22202 • Telephone (703) 558-1000 IDA

Nov 7, 1969

Dan Ellsberg:

Here is a two-page note which, by coincidence, I had typed out about an hour before you called. It shows my heart is in the right place.

I assume you will be back in town again before long. Give me a call if you have a chance.

Best regards,

HM

Howard Margolis

Howard Margolis/ November 6, 1969

NOTE ON VIETNAMIZATION

1. The most crucial point of the Administration plan is that our withdrawals are to be contingent on Saigon's ability to carry on the war: that they are, in the President's words, to be withdrawals "from strength."

2. The President's position on this must be accepted at face value, and not dismissed as brave talk to cover an intent to withdraw come what may. It is conceivable that the President has not adequately thought through all the implications of the course he is following; and it is very conceivable that he will eventually regret having taken that course; but there is little room for doubt that he means exactly what he has said. For the statements of the Administration, culminating in the recent speeches of the President and Vice-President, have had the entirely foreseeable effect of alienating the dove while simultaneously maximizing the disillusionment the hawks will feel should Saigon fall after our ground forces are withdrawn.

3. The President's position puts a very heavy burden on air power. Air power is, increasingly, to be the major U.S. contribution to the war in South Vietnam. Air power will also, almost certainly, have to be the key to deterring North Vietnam from undertaking actions which inhibit or destroy the President's plan.

4. How realistic it is to expect air power to be effective in the South and effective as a deterrent on the North is obviously contingent on how big the job is. In the most favorable case, Saigon's forces are essentially prepared to take on the ground war, and our air power is

merely providing helpful, but not crucial support. Threats against the North are required, if at all, only to deter very gross North Vietnamese attempts to step up their intervention to reverse this situation.

5. But if the situation is not so favorable, then the job for air power in the South quickly becomes unrealistically large, and the hope that we can adequately affect the war by threats to resume bombing the North becomes increasingly dangerous.

6. The alternatives to faith in air power as the basis for the President's unlimited recommittment of American prestige to the war are exceedingly few in number. We can rule out as completely implausible a re-escalation of the American ground combat role. Anyone familiar with the details of the war will be aware that a threat to increase the level of our air activity within South Vietnam promises no substantial effect on the enemy. Those operations are already being carried on to the point of exceedingly modest marginal returns. The only remaining alternative--aside from threats of a renewed and presumably less restrained bombing campaign against the North--is to force a confrontation with the Soviets in the hope that the Soviets will thereupon retreat from support of Hanoi: a nuclear threat against North Vietnam or a blockade of shipping to North Vietnam are the likeliest forms for arranging such a confrontation.

Consequently, as a simple exercise in logic, we must either have unlimited faith in Saigon's ability to take over the ground war, or we must be prepared to gamble once again on air power or perhaps something even more risky. We are back to where we were in 1964. And although we are always told that history repeats itself, does it have to be repeated so soon?